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LETTER DATED 25 FEBRUARY 1991 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNION OF SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLICS TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

I have the honour to transmit to you the text of the statement by the Soviet Government concerning the start of ground operations in the Persian Gulf region.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the statement circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Y. VORONTSOV

Annex

Statement by the Soviet Government

United States President George Bush announced at dawn on 24 February that he had ordered the start of ground operations against Iraq.

The instinct to rely on a military solution prevailed, despite the fact that Iraq's agreement to withdraw its forces from Kuwait in keeping with United Nations Security Council resolution 660 (1990) had created a basically new situation, clearing the way to channelling the Gulf conflict towards a political settlement. As is known, Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz told a news conference in Moscow on 23 February that the Iraqi leadership was prepared to withdraw all its forces immediately and unconditionally from Kuwait to the positions in which they were located on 1 August 1990.

The Soviet Union, which had done much to impel Iraq to take that step, urged the international community to take advantage of the opportunity to prevent the conflict from escalating into a still more acute and bloodier phase. In the course of 23 February, the Soviet President had telephone conversations with the leaders of the United States of America, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, France, Italy, Germany, Japan, Syria, Egypt and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Before that, the Soviet President had sent personal messages to the Heads of State and Government of all countries members of the Security Council, as well as to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, briefing them on the results of the latest round of talks with Tariq Aziz in Moscow, which produced qualitative shifts in Iraq's position. The Governments of Arab States were informed of the steps we were taking. The Soviet representative to the United Nations took steps aimed at convening an emergency meeting of the Security Council to examine on an urgent basis the situation that had arisen, set the date for the start of the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait, and resolve the issue of confirming, verifying and monitoring the cease-fire and the troop withdrawal.

The Soviet Union expresses regret that a very real chance of securing a peaceful outcome to the conflict and achieving the objectives set by the Security Council resolutions without further casualties and destruction has been missed.

The differences between the formulas accepted by Iraq and the proposals by a number of other countries were slight, and lent themselves to resolution in the Security Council framework within a day or two. It is still not too late to do this. The Security Council, which is now meeting, should get down to examining without delay the new situation that has taken shape.